

CHRISTIAN DRAMA

edited by

JOHN HESTER

cover designed by JOHN PIPER

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All opinions expressed in these pages are personal, and are not necessarily those of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain

Vol. 3 Number 11

Christmas, 1958

Published by:

THE RELIGIOUS DRAMA SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN
166 SHAFTESBURY AVENUE, LONDON, W.C. 2

Telephone: COVent Garden 3304/5

CHRISTIAN DRAMA: 6/6 per annum (post free)



GEORGE KENNEDY ALLEN BELL

b. 1883

d. 1958

(Howard Cost

EDITORIAL

The death of Bishop Bell removes from the earthly scene one who has played a primary part in the remarkable revival of Christian Drama during the last quarter of a century. His death came shortly after his retirement from a distinguished episcopate in the Diocese of Chichester—a retirement which was marked in the Upper House of Convocation by a moving tribute from the Archbishop of Canterbury. It was a great source of satisfaction to the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain that the Bishop should devote his final activity in Convocation to the introduction of a resolution concerned with the Society and its place in the Church. As is stated elsewhere by one who had been most closely associated with him, Bishop Bell was a wise friend and leader to the Society from its very foundation, and the debt which the Society owes to him and to his memory could never be told in words. His memorial in the field of religious drama is around us for all to see, in almost every town and village in the country. The inspiration which he derived so clearly from the Holy Spirit of God is shared with all those who benefit from the results of his life. For that life we are most profoundly grateful, and pray sincerely for him as he enters now into his reward.

The Society as it looks to the future can do no better than echo the Bishop's words in that Convocation speech in January of this year, and "trust that the work thus begun may continue to go forward under wise direction".

BISHOP BELL

By E. MARTIN BROWNE

Bishop Bell was the father of modern Religious Drama. It was he who as Dean of Canterbury invited three of the foremost artists of the stage to collaborate in the creation of *The Coming of Christ*, the first play to be performed in Canterbury Cathedral for nearly 400 years, and thereby extended the Church's welcome to artists long banished from within her walls. He was the first to create a post within the Church for drama, when he appointed me as Director of Religious Drama in the Diocese of Chichester in 1930. It was at his home that T. S. Eliot was, in the same year, first interested in writing plays for the Church: out of this interest came *The Rock* in 1934, and again it was Bishop Bell who, when he saw that work, arranged that Mr. Eliot be invited to write for the Friends of Canterbury Cathedral the play which proved to be *Murder in the Cathedral*. It was he who encouraged the young Christopher Fry, then living in East Sussex, to write *The Boy with a Cart*. His friendship sustained in many poets such as Lascelles Abercrombie, Charles Williams, Robert Nichols (who also lived in the diocese) the belief that the Church needed them; and he brought a number of them together at the Palace for a week-end to explore the possibilities in common.

I remember sitting with him and Mrs. Bell in a tiny village church, watching a Nativity Play written in pantomime doggerel by the vicar for the children of his school; and the delight with which he saw the Innkeeper look in the Visitors' Book to see if a room were free! He could be moved by the simplicity of such work if it were genuinely devoted: but he had no illusions about the limits within which this naïve type of drama, so common in the Church, was useful. His desire was always that the Church should offer a welcome to the finest in all the arts, drama not least; and he was willing to allow the artist his freedom as creator. As usual, he was fearless in upholding this freedom when the artist seemed to be transgressing the bounds of orthodoxy, and equally strong in persuading the artist to recognise the Christian point of view.

When in 1929 two non-Anglicans, Sir Francis Younghusband and Mrs. Olive Stevenson, came to him to ask his support for the formation of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain, the newly-appointed Bishop of Chichester at once accepted the Presidency of the Society and held that office until his death. His wise guidance through the difficult paths which an interdenominational body has to tread culminated in the first International Conference on Religious Drama at Oxford in 1955. He presided over the sessions, and closed his perfectly balanced summing-up with the observation that, although the Church and drama could not yet be said to be married to one another, at least they were "walking out". When Union Theological Seminary, New York, proposed to inaugurate a Programme in Religious Drama in 1956, Bishop Bell in his characteristically unobtrusive way established a valuable link between the English Society and the American project which was to influence development in that continent.

For his last appearance in the Upper House of Convocation before his retirement, he chose to move a motion on Religious Drama in a speech which both recounted the history of the movement and insisted with his wonted vigour that Christian plays "must be works of art in their own domain—nothing second-rate would do".

(Continued on page 17.)

THE THEATRE TRAP

by JAMES R. CARLSON

The layman at the theatre is often made to feel dull and unappreciative by critics whose view of the drama reflects lofty religious and theological principles. He is intimidated by their many-levelled meanings and their affirmation of the playwright as thinker, the spectator as critic, and the theatre as intellectual encounter. In more relaxed moments, these probers may come down to play with him a parlour game known as "What is the meaning of *Waiting for Godot*?" or to join him in that classical recreation called "Is it tragedy?" But he plays badly and feels excluded from their world of special insight.

Please do not mistake me; these are important critical enterprises and indicate a kind of exciting engagement most relevant to the pursuit of religious issues in the theatre. They open understandings and suggest interesting interpretations. But complications arise when their rules are carried into the theatre itself. The theatre-goer who demands that the theatre supply such intellectual exercise is a breed apart from the man who says quite bluntly, "Entertain me; I paid six-eighths for a good time. If I don't have one, I'll demand my money back. I'm not interested in a message I can take home with me!"

This desire for stimulation of the senses and insistence upon the show for its own sake may blind the spectator to the profound parables of the contemporary theatre and may make him unfit for the role of exegete. On the other hand, it may be an attitude necessary for appreciating the theatre experience as such. The playwright is a thinker, and the spectator ought not to put his brain in storage when he goes to the theatre. But the mode of thought, if thought it is, in the theatre does not depend primarily upon logical analysis and systematic interpretation.

Efforts to describe the religious meaning of a play, to assess its theological consistencies or inconsistencies, to make it into a religious parable—no matter how sophisticated and profound—are secondary as far as the total theatre experience is concerned. Such efforts pushed too far, too soon, may prevent us from the full realization of that total experience. The audience which first of all expects an intellectual engagement deprives itself of access to the life of the theatre. The stance of the critic is not proper for the spectator who would involve himself in the art experience. Hopefully, criticism will follow involvement; it may enhance the ensuing art experience, but does not coexist with the experience itself.

We may then ask what is the nature of this involvement? What properly bounds a full response to a painting, to the performance of a piece of music, to the theatrical life of a play?

Denis de Rougemont provides a helpful analogy to the "working" of a work of art when he calls it a *trap*. Art, he says, has no *mission*. "As distinct from all other products of human action, the work of art is an object of which the 'raison d'être' necessary and sufficient is to *signify*, organically and by means of its own structure." The work of art, de Rougemont insists, is designed to orient existence to something which transcends sounds and forms, or the world so assembled. . . . It is a trap, but an oriented trap, a calculated trap for meditation".¹

¹ "Religion and the Mission of the Artist" in *Spiritual Problems in Contemporary Literature*, edited by Stanley Romaine Hopper. Harper & Bros., New York. p. 176.

What, then, is the theatre trap? We may describe it as a device created to unite attention on a particular expression of reality. The modern playwright will seek to express this reality even at the price of ugliness. It is not his concern to make things beautiful or to flatter the beliefs of even the conscientious spectator or critic. He sets the trap and can only hope that it will catch the audience. The trap is constructed of a complex of actions taking place in the theatrical representation of life. This is something of the Aristotelian "imitation of an action". Reason and feeling are seen in the "imitation" in a way possible in "real" life. Within and outside of the imitation, the spectator ranges; sometimes he is lost, sometimes he is cruelly aware of the boundaries of the illusion. And the action both within and outside of the imitation strikes out at the spectator's sensibilities, his convictions, his beliefs. An awareness may grow that is beyond ordinary comprehension and is "twice as real". This, the theatre trap, is not a thing of beauty and a joy forever, but an action made out of life.

Such an analysis would perhaps suggest that religious interest in the drama is not limited to plays of religious commitment—and certainly not to plays whose characters and events are drawn from canon, although such plays may provide appropriate ways for celebration and renewal. Rather, we might wish to find in theatre the most rigorous engagement between play and spectator, an engagement that would exercise rather than soothe our souls—regardless of subject matter. Walter Gutkelch at the Oxford conference on Religious Drama in 1955 spoke of this kind of encounter. "To-day, the digging out of wild growing objections is often, even for the believer, a more efficient confirmation of his state of redemption than meditation or prayer."¹ There would seem to be a special need for the saying of "yes" or of "no". We will look for the plays that will ask the embarrassing and pertinent questions.

At the same time, we will do well to remember that the theatrical question is not the same as the moral, the theological, or the religious question. It is a product of the "trap" which shapes the experience out of which the question arises. It grows out of the stuff of experience and imagination. The parable that we may detect in a play—which the author may or may not have placed there—is only one aspect of the play and the experience which it embodies for us. And frequently it is not the basic one. For the work of art is not made up of systems of belief or logical arguments. Pirandello observed that "an artist's ideas are not abstract ideas but feelings, sentiments, which become the centre of his inner life, take hold of his spirit, shake it and by shaking it, create a body of images".

The function of the play may be to take hold of our spirits and to shake them. We frequently label a play obscure and meaningless when we cannot trace a sequential plot, a connected theme, and a logical point of view. At the same time, we may be intensely involved in the play on a plane close to its central emotional movement, and we may be responding in a vital manner to its structure, to what we may call its shape or form—its alternation of rhythms, its pattern of conflict, its growth and release of tensions. This structure we are likely to discount as a bearer of meaning if at the same time we do not find more explicit statements laid over it in dialogue, plot, or character. These specific statements may be provided, and they may parallel the organic expression in the structure. But one sometimes exists without the other. When only the explicit statement exists, we find false drama; when only the shape exists, we may find difficult drama.

¹ *Christian Drama*, Special International Conference Number, Autumn, 1955. p. 28.

The plays of Samuel Beckett are apt illustrations. The anguish, the pathos, the despair and, yes, the hope, which we experience in witnessing them are not conveyed by the plots, for there are none. They are products partly of characterization and situation, but more fundamentally of the shapes of the plays. And these experiences are, it seems to me, their meaning. I would not suggest that more explicit intellectual interpretations cannot be found for the plays, but their "open-mindedness" in this regard is one of their virtues.



(David Sim)

SAMUEL BECKETT'S *ENDGAME* AS PRODUCED IN THE ORIGINAL FRENCH
AT THE ROYAL COURT THEATRE, LONDON

The hopefulness of *Endgame* was perfectly obvious to me when I saw its New York performance at the Cherry Lane. After participating in the excruciating agony of Hamm's life, I heard him say:

"You weep, and weep, for nothing, so as not to laugh,
and little by little . . . you begin to grieve.
All those I might have helped.

Helped. Saved. Saved. The place was crawling with them! Use
your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth,
there's no cure for that!"

And then looking straight at me, he said:

"Get out of here and love one another!

Lick your neighbour as yourself."¹

I wanted to cry out, but one doesn't do that in the theatre these days. However, my point is that the explicitness of this warning at this particular moment in the play is not more dramatic because of its explicitness. It may have helped to provide me with the key to my own particular explanation of the play, but my explanation, right or wrong, is not central to the immediate theatrical experience. The explanation was part of a subsequent, related experience.

But submitting ourselves to the work of art as a "calculated trap" is not the end of our difficulties. In one sense, it is the beginning. The work of art by its very nature and mission is a difficult thing. And we cannot explain away the difficulty. It lies both with the artist and with the audience, and no good end is served by taking sides and accusing the artist of unintelligibility or accusing the audience of ignorance. Both judgments are repeatedly correct and more than likely always will be. The artist looks at the contemporary world and finds his creative task fraught with great anguish and torment. Reality presents itself to him in a fractured picture of confusion presaging imminent doom. And at the same time he is stripped of the firm images, the unifying beliefs which make communication feasible. What can he do but "howl"? What he brings to his audience will be coloured by his despair and anguish, if it is not despair itself. He is both judge and judged. Ortega y Gasset comments that modern art is unpopular "in essence and by deliberation". As members of the audience, we are conscious only of the difficulties existing from our side. The anguish and defeat in a work of art cannot be dealt with until we are willing to deal with the anguish and defeat in our own experience. We shy away from judgment by calling it obscure and difficult. Or, on the other hand, we talk it over, explain it, pronounce its truth; but avoid facing truth in the very acts of describing and pronouncing. Here is the possibility of pain, and we would prefer entertainment.

I think one of the admirable aspects of the recent production of John Osborne's play, *The Entertainer*, is its refusal to avoid this kind of difficulty. The temptation to make Archie Rice a more sympathetic character must have been great. But the harshness and isolation of the role forbid our sympathy. Henry Hewes in *The Saturday Review* pays tribute to this achievement:

"As we watch him (Sir Laurence Olivier) go through his music hall routines, there is never a moment when this great actor allows us the merciful relief of satire or the satisfaction of easy entertainment. Instead there is always a sense of leashed terror, of subconscious awareness, of the growing distance between life deteriorating and life potential."

The language of faith and the language of the theatre have common difficulties here. Professor Amos Wilder's development of this theme is well known:

"The language of faith may . . . be difficult and strange because we have not lived through the costs that illuminate it. It is a question of where we live and of our standpoint."

He reminds us that the language of art and of faith "provide meaning for those who have the same initiation".

(Continued on page 23.)

¹ *Endgame*, a play by Samuel Beckett. Grove Press, New York, 1958. Faber & Faber, p. 68.

LONDON THEATRE

by JOHN HESTER

Mr. Tennessee Williams' claim to be regarded as the most complete playwright working to-day in the English language is strengthened by his latest work to be seen in London, the double bill under the title *Garden District*, produced by Mr. Herbert Machiz at the Arts Theatre on September 17th. The two pieces have in common their setting in the rich Garden District of New Orleans and their subject matter of sexual frustration. The curtain raiser, *Something Unsaid*, is a duologue for a pretentious southern lady and her secretary companion. Years earlier the lady had taken the secretary, newly widowed, into her home hoping to take the place of her departed husband. Now after fifteen long years the secretary feels herself covered with cobwebs, the lady unsatisfied in the response for which she longed. We join this couple during the critical moments when the lady is failing also to achieve her public goal, the leadership of a women's association. Miss Beryl Measor played the lady, Miss Beatrix Lehmann the secretary. The second and longer play, *Suddenly Last Summer*, is a study of a mother strongly attached to her son, meeting the woman who had taken her place during the final months of the man's life, whom she holds responsible for his failure and death, and who has been consigned to an asylum for the story which she has told. Years before, the son had seen a vision of what he called God, meaning the reality of what lay behind his existence, and the play's first electric climax is when Miss Lehmann as the mother describes this vision, great black birds swooping from the sky to devour the vital, tender centres of newly hatched turtles. Equalling this first in horror is the second climax when the girl, played by Miss Patricia Neal, describes the ghastly means by which the prophetic vision was realized in the life and death of the wretched son. The dramatic power of these moments cannot be described on paper, nor indeed should they be, for the reader of these pages is not necessarily as strong-stomached as one assumes a Williams theatre audience to be. Suffice it to say that for the present writer they provided an experience of unforgettable depth. The playwright's skill and supreme grasp of all branches of his art carry one with him, and as the corpus of his work grows through these exciting years one probes with him always deeper into the human dilemma, searching out the truths of our existence through the labyrinthine ways of our fallen nature. One must believe that if Mr. Williams looks hard and long enough for the truth he will discover the person of the Incarnate Christ, and so see humanity transfigured by what He has done for it.

The first of the three giants who dominate the contemporary American theatre was Eugene O'Neill, and September 24th saw presented at the Globe Theatre his *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. Here we meet again that view of the human dilemma from which Mr. Williams has obviously drawn so much, personality grating upon personality and no escape. In *Long Day's Journey Into Night* the characters return again and again to burn their wings, like moths at a flame, upon blurred, uncontrollable truths which should never be spoken. The Tyrones are a family of parents and two sons seen during one day of their lives. Longing for cohesive unity, they are yet driven by their natures to hurt each other, rocketing from vicious plain speaking to desperate

repentance and back again. Here is a terrible observation upon an aspect of our complex human selves, many of which are spoiled alas by just such ungovernable passions. When the father, played by Mr. Anthony Quayle, quotes Cassius we are at the heart of the matter as O'Neill sees it: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves". (Words which we were shortly to hear delivered by Mr. Michael Hordern in the lively production of *Julius Caesar* at the Old Vic on October 8th). O'Neill's play was tenderly and passionately performed by Mr. Quayle; by Miss Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies



(Angus McBean)

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' *GARDEN DISTRICT* AT THE ARTS THEATRE

as the mother, unable to resist the lure of her drug-produced dream world and reliving again the golden days when she had hoped to be a nun; by Mr. Alan Bates as the consumptive son whose birth had been the cause of his mother's descent; and by Mr. Ian Bannen as the alcoholic elder son who concentrates within himself the sum failure of his father's life. Mr. José Quintero directed the play here as in New York, and Mr. David Hays designed the setting.

"The truth will out" is the key to the drama also in Schiller's *Mary Stuart* (Old Vic, September 17th). In this play theatrical power is gained, but historical accuracy forfeited, by a meeting of the unfortunate Queen of Scots with her cousin Elizabeth shortly before Mary's death on the scaffold at Fotheringay. Driven it seems, like the Tyrones, by the fatal logic of her

nature she utters to the English queen that final insult which seals her fate. Despite her faults and weakness she pursues a relentless pathway to the truth in the face of one who is a total stranger to objective truth as we know it. This scene, the emotional climax of the play, was superbly enacted by Miss Catherine Lacey as Elizabeth and Miss Irene Worth as Mary. Mr. Leslie Hurry's costumes were unforgettable in their splendour, and Mr. Peter Wood's production of Mr. Stephen Spender's translation quite excellent.

Again like the Tyrones, the characters of Mr. T. S. Eliot's new play *The Elder Statesman* are also concerned with confessions within the family, or rather one of them is, the father. The piece was first performed in London at the Cambridge Theatre on September 25th*, and revealed itself as an East Anglian landscape of a play, without hills or valleys: it is indeed so static and fundamentally undramatic that Mr. E. Martin Browne has achieved, one suspects, something of a wonder in breathing the life into it which it has. Like another writer on the subject I confess to feeling guilty at not being happier over this latest work from our most distinguished poet, who achieved his seventieth birthday some hours after the London premiere of his play. I felt stupid for missing the beauty of the verse, but failed again at a second attempt. The play begins at what should be the second act, for we are given very little view of the previous Lord Claverton who is so vastly changed through the agency of the two figures who reappear out of his past, and the glimpse he has of happiness perceived through his daughter's love. Indeed we see his redemption, but are told only didactically, not dramatically, from what. As Claverton, who finds consolation in confession, Mr. Paul Rogers was restored to stage eminence by his superbly quiet playing which stood up well to the delightful flamboyance of Mr. William Squire and Miss Eileen Peel.*

Perhaps the most promising occasion for the British theatre this decade will prove to be the arrival of Mr. Peter Shaffer, whose first play, *Five Finger Exercise*, was introduced at the Comedy Theatre on July 16th, directed by Sir John Gielgud. The five characters whose interrelation make up the exercise consist of a wealthy self-made man, his frustrated wife, a poetically minded son going up to Cambridge, a pertly adolescent daughter being schooled at home, and a refugee young German newly employed as her tutor. This outsider brings to a head the crisis which has been implicit ever since husband and wife were married, and lately tautened by certain tendencies in the son and boisterous self-assurance in the daughter. From this situation Mr. Shaffer has made a fine play, showing vividly that it is only by facing up to the truth of ourselves as we are that we can hope to come to terms with them and live. It is significant perhaps that both father and son turn in the play's last moments to prayer: the father to the simple prayer of a practical man: "God, please let him live . . ." (over the half-dead figure of the young stranger, driven to the point of suicide); the son to the more subtle prayer of a deeper soul: "Give us courage . . .". The play was admirably acted throughout, with specially complete performances from Mr. Michael Bryant as the tutor, and Mr. Brian Bedford and Miss Juliet Mills as the son and daughter.

A revival of *Major Barbara* must always be notable and that at the Royal Court, its theatre of origin, on August 28th was especially so. One asked again just how far was Shaw on the side of the angels, and re-discovered that it was much more than he would have cared directly to admit. Having survived the dramatic tempering of their enthusiasm, the outlook for Barbara and Adolphus is good, for they have certainty of intention and the means to

carry out the good works which they intend. Only during the long drawn-out lecture on poverty did the play seem to be outmoded; for the rest it was as vital as ever.

It is said that Shaw was interested only in religion and politics. What would he have made, one wonders, of the two political plays which the season has offered? Each using unusual production methods, each with an already sharpened axe to grind, and yet as different from each other as the metaphorical chalk from cheese. These were Mr. George Tabori's satire *Brouhaha* (Aldwych Theatre, August 27th), and Mr. Robert Ardrey's harrowing *Shadow of Heroes* (Piccadilly Theatre, October 7th). In the first Mr. Peter Sellers plays a Sultan who plans prosperity for his desolate kingdom by making it a storm centre which the great powers will fall over themselves to "assist": he succeeds to the extent that his kingdom is blown up about his ears. There is much meaning lying unconcealed beneath the surface of Mr. Peter Hall's goonish production. Could there for example be a better commentary on the Islamic faith that when the Sultan remarks on the death of one character: "What God giveth he also taketh away and that's that!"? Mr. Ardrey is in more apparently deadly earnest in his play, which deals with events leading up to the horrors of the recent Hungarian revolution. Both he and Mr. Tabori hate communists, but in *Shadow of Heroes* we are really shown why, through the eyes of the author as portrayed upon the stage by Mr. Emlyn Williams. Motives as well as results are Mr. Ardrey's concern in this unusual work and he has observations of outstanding penetration to make upon each side. The producer of this piece was again Mr. Peter Hall, and with the achievement of *Brouhaha* so freshly behind him we were reminded once more of his steadily rising genius.

Finally *Irma-la-Douce*, produced by Mr. Peter Brook at the Lyric Theatre on July 17th. Were an English writer to create such a character he would certainly have a moralising or demoralising tale to tell: but Mr. Alexandre Breffort is French, and for some unaccountable reason that makes things seem different. His Irma, a Parisian prostitute, may indeed have a heart of gold, but what strikes us most about her are her radiant vitality and unshakable simplicity. She clearly loves her work in a way unhindered by conscience, yet her sin, so gloriously unhidden, is a warm one, and leads her without surprise into final domesticity. She is a lover of life, and one cannot fail to love her in return—more particularly when the part is presented through the warm and overflowing personality of Miss Elizabeth Seal.

I must say in conclusion, rather as a footnote, that the final tableau of *Irma-la-Douce*, in which Irma with her new-born twin sons receives presents of guns, bullet-proof prams, etc., from members of the Parisian underworld has been criticized as a blasphemous parody of the Nativity. Indeed it purports to take place at Christmastide, and the music was a sort of carol tune. But I do not myself feel that the criticism (which is a serious one) was justified, and myself found nothing distasteful in the scene.

* Readers will be interested to read a very different opinion of this play, written in *Frontier* by Mr. John Lawrance under the title "The Crown of Mr. Eliot's Work", and here quoted with his permission:

"In *The Elder Statesman* Mr. T. S. Eliot has written a contemporary Everyman. You and I and everyone are the Elder Statesman. All Mr. Eliot's previous plays seem to be a preparation for this play. Here at last he has

CORRECTION

See page 13

The plays are now planned for the Autumn and the closing date for the Competition is 20th MARCH 1959.

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See page 13

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found the perfect form for what he wants to say; and he goes so quietly beyond what he has said before that one may not take in at once what he is doing to one. In *The Elder Statesman* the teaching of modern psychology about the neurotic self and the true self and the Christian teaching about contrition and forgiveness come together naturally and lead to a showing of the true nature of love that is simpler and more direct than anything in English literature for many years. Every difficulty is faced through to the end, so that in the end a very simple honest statement about love carries conviction. When this play has had time to work its way into the consciousness of our generation I think we shall be less mawkish and more out-spoken in our intimate relations. The play makes no open appeal to religion but in its quiet way it may start the conversion of many souls."

PLAY COMPETITION

The Religious Drama Society of Great Britain's newly formed professional company, Theatre Group Productions, announces a **PLAY COMPETITION**. The work most suitable for church production will be included in a group of seven plays to be produced in London. These will tour leading churches throughout the United Kingdom next Spring.

Essential qualifications are an absorbing story containing an indirect Christian approach to any subject which will appeal to the wider public, and a small cast to lessen production problems.

Closing date January 1st, 1959.

A SUMMER WORKSHOP IN THE U.S.A.

By CARINA ROBINS

Pamela Keily and I were invited by Dr. Robert Seaver, Director of Drama at Union Theological Seminary, New York, to go as guest tutors to a three-week workshop at Union in July-August. This course was the first of its kind to be held at Union, the subject being Christianity and the Arts—or, to give the full title—"Communicating the Christian faith in a mass culture through Drama, Broadcasting and Film".

Our readers have already heard about the experimental three year programme in religious drama that is being carried out at this Seminary under the inspiration of the Principal, Dr. Van Dusen, who is now a Vice-President of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain. Mr. and Mrs. Martin Browne were the first to go out from this Society at the start of this programme, Mrs. K. M. Baxter followed them last winter, and now the Martin Brownes have returned to direct the last eight months while Mr. Seaver takes his Sabbatical leave.

During the first week of our Summer Workshop all students, whether they were mainly interested in drama, broadcasting or films, worked together, attending a most interesting series of lectures given by Dr. Albert T. Mollegen, Dr. Samuel H. Miller, and Dr. Marvin P. Halverson. Dr. John W. Bachman acted as co-ordinator of the Workshops. These lectures were followed by discussion periods, and the viewing of plays, films and radio. Of the plays I saw, the two which impressed me most were *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller, which was being played in the round in a small theatre off Broadway; and on Broadway, *West Side Story*, a musical tragedy, which is being brought to London this month.

The Crucible is a great play and certainly it is religious drama. *West Side Story* is terrifying. It is the story of rival teenager gangs, and it seems to me that here we who are concerned with Christian communication are faced with a tremendous challenge, that of convincing these young people who are brim-full of the zest of life, that they are in fact heading in the wrong direction, for fullness of life can only be found in Christ.

For the last two weeks the forty drama students separated from the rest, under the leadership of Dr. Robert Seaver, Dr. Tom F. Driver, Miss Winifred Ward, Professor Harold Ehrensperger, the Rev. Harold Bassage, Miss Keily and myself. In addition to lectures and discussions, the programme included practical sessions in acting, informal dramatics and the production of plays in church or hall. The first session was at 8.30 a.m., and from then we went at it non-stop save for a lunch interval till 5 o'clock. This would have been a pretty full day in winter time, but much more so in the humid heat of New York City in mid-summer. I think the students felt the strain as much as the staff, but, personally, I wouldn't have missed any of it. The enthusiasm of the students, and their easy friendly co-operation and insatiable desire to

learn, made each day a delight. On the last evening we gave demonstration rehearsals, using excerpts from some of the plays on which we had been working and it was encouraging to see with what appreciation these were received.

The students at this course had come from all over the States. They were of many denominations and professions—directors of religious education, professors of speech and drama, ministers, university students, and so on. It seems that the United States has not had as much experience in religious drama as we have, and the dearth of plays is far greater there than here. The speaking chorus play came as an entirely new idea to the majority, and they have little experience of the possibilities and dangers of playing in church. One student told of a production of *The Cocktail Party* given before the altar in a church! Until the time comes when they can have their own religious drama society they are eager to join ours, to be introduced to new plays, and to receive all the help and advice we can give them. Robert Seaver has been appointed our Society's interim agent in the U.S.A., and is already dealing with a considerable amount of business on our behalf, including giving permission for frequent performances of Philip Turner's play *Christ in the Concrete City*.

Miss Keily and I gathered from conversation that their ministers are not as deeply concerned as ours with the problem of communicating the Faith to non-believers, because their churches are crowded, and their time is mostly spent in looking after those who enter. This is only a general impression and probably not true in all areas. We had little opportunity for church-going ourselves, but the daily 8 a.m. service in the Seminary was always well attended.

Though there was not much time for sight-seeing, and we couldn't go up the famous one hundred and two storeys of the Empire State Building, we did spend three hours one Saturday morning cruising round Manhattan Island in a motor boat. This we enjoyed greatly and were able to see many famous landmarks both on the island and on the mainland. The skyscrapers which look impressive from any and every angle are seen at their best from the water. Our most witty guide poured forth unlimited information, taking special care to tell us the cost of this and that!

In a community so conscious of material wealth, it was all the more heartening to find a group of Christians willing to spend three weeks of intensive and exhausting activity on a study which had nothing to do with the Golden Calf. Looking back on the three weeks at Union I find that while the hard work and heat are forgotten, the gaiety remains. There was something most attractive in the power of appreciation shown by those with whom I worked, in their humility and readiness to criticise themselves, and in their eagerness to learn from others. It was pleasant to find how much they admire the British and the British Isles. I need hardly say that I learnt a great deal from them, and I hope that the give and take between our two countries in the field of religious drama will steadily grow.

When the Course ended, I went off to spend a short holiday in the States before flying home. Miss Keily, before starting her holiday, accepted an invitation to go straight off to Cape Cod, there to produce a play in ten days in the centre of a round church amongst a summer holiday population. This she achieved in spite of all manner of difficulties.

THE ANNUNCIATION OF PENTECOST

By FREDA COLLINS

"The children looked such little darlings round the cradle," she said.

My friend had been trained as a professional actress. It was on that account that she had been asked to produce a Nativity play in the village. She worked very hard with the children, and I heard every detail of the rehearsals and production, including the mislaying of Gabriel's robes at the last moment. The only thing which was not mentioned was any instruction in the Christian faith, or any prayers. This was not surprising, as my kind-hearted friend was a Jewish agnostic.

This fact, which was generally known in the village, seemed to disturb no-one. They were all delighted with the play, and the usual compliments were exchanged.

I kept unusually quiet. My friend had generously given of her time and talent. She respected the religious convictions of others, but to her the story of the Nativity was a pretty little legend. The children enjoyed themselves enormously.

Perhaps there had been some instruction elsewhere which I knew nothing about, but I wondered otherwise, what, precisely, was the use, or disuse of that production. What could the children involved have experienced of the Christian faith by acting a play about the birth of a baby called Jesus, unless it were absorbed by them that Jesus is *the* Baby? In fact, the Son of God?

So, for many years, I resentfully ruminated about that production. It had made a great impression upon me, although I did not see it. Then a further implication dawned on me in connection with my own production of Nativity plays with children of practically no instruction in the Christian Faith.

They also "looked such darlings kneeling round the Crib", but they also experienced quite truly something of the Presence of God and of prayer apart from just "saying prayers". They knew that their play was an act of worship, or as we put it: "a birthday present for Jesus", and they really did know, by the end of the production, something of the meaning of the Annunciation and Birth of the Son of God. But what else?

The horror that I had felt at my friend's kindly intentioned production began to descend upon myself. Did those children really know what happened to that Baby, and why he had come into the world? A few of them might glibly say that he had died on a cross, but *why* he had so died, and any connection between the Nativity, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection (if they knew about this) and the coming of the Holy Ghost as a practical, living reality to help their own lives, certainly was outside both their knowledge and their experience.

The cast, and probably the audience, had probably received a sub-Christian impression of the Christian Faith.

It was this dawning realisation which led me some years ago to introduce the gift of holly berries at the crib with words which would link the Nativity with the Atonement; words which we were at pains to try to explain to the children:

"We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee, because by thy holy Cross and Precious Blood thou hast redeemed the world."

Now I realized that this alone was not sufficient. The children must be led through the experience of a real devotion to the Incarnate Lord, not only to an acknowledgement of his death, but to some sort of realisation that this same Baby, the Son of God, returns to each of us now, to-day, and as he promised, in the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit. This, surely, is the practical application of the word "redemption".

And so I settled to a little hard, constructive thinking regarding what we really ought to be doing, if and when we undertake the presentation of Nativity Plays.

First, the facts of the Faith.

Our Lord Jesus Christ chose to be incarnate, to die upon the cross and to rise again from the dead precisely (as he explained to us, mainly in chapters 14-17 of St. John's Gospel) so that we should be able to receive his abiding Presence, however he chooses that it shall come, but always in the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit. This, then, is the reason for the Birth of Christ. It is this Fellowship of the Holy Spirit which brings significance to Christianity, and leads us through death into eternal Life.

Therefore, unless we are to give a lop-sided impression of Christianity, we *must* link this essential truth to the others when we attempt to produce a liturgical play.

"But!" the cry goes up, "as it is, we scarcely have time to teach the words of the play and to fasten the safety pins in Gabriel's robe."

I know it. Yet true teaching must have its place, otherwise of what use is the play?

Presumably at some time during each rehearsal, we pray with our children. Could we not do this round the manger, and patiently state, week after week, the central truth that this Babe came to teach us: that of the abiding Presence, NOT ONLY of the Second Person, but of all three Persons of the Trinity. Then the words of the *Gloria Patri* will begin to make sense.

We may not have time to elaborate; we may be ourselves incapable of explanation; but we can at least take trouble to make these facts the main-spring of our own lives so that we can sincerely *affirm* them. Then the children will not be left in a state of spiritual suspension at the Crib. By our constant reference to the Gift of Pentecost, we shall in some degree begin to relate the Nativity to the whole revelation of God.

It would not take a great deal of time to think about, and to speak about, clause by clause, the words which the children hear used so often with so little understanding: and through which we, and they, can be helped to realise the Presence of the Trinity in our lives here and now:

"The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit. . . ."

Bishop Bell, continued from page 4).

By his death, Religious Drama has lost one who is absolutely irreplaceable. To speak personally, I am one among many hundreds who know that we have also lost an irreplaceable friend. Wisdom, which often saved me from error and as often inspired me to do better than I knew, never sat heavily upon him, but was always mixed with gaiety. No one can be so young in heart as he was who does not walk close to God.

(Part of this article was previously printed in *The Times*.)

EXETER 1958

By RONALD AYRES

Any more factual report of Summer School must be something of a disappointment, for on looking back it can be seen that it was not exactly what was done that made the nine days so profitable, but the spirit in which it was done, and the fellowship which surrounded it. It is this which on the last day makes you say, "See you again next year", though you were planning to tour Italy on the cheap and miss Summer School.

However a course that was all spirit and no facts would only presumably suit a medium sized School, and this was a large one with plenty of solid facts. (No personal reference intended.) St. Luke's College proved an excellent base for the School and provided all that was required in accommodation and facilities. On all counts we were well served. The tutors gave unsparingly of themselves and gave it with charm and friendliness. The organisation of the School was smooth and efficient, without any hint of militarism, and we can seldom have been better led in worship and instruction than we were by our Chaplains this year. Whether we were rushing from Speech to Movement, or going mad in *Peer Gynt*, or making a Mummy (Egyptian, of course!) under Miss Lamplugh's guidance, the verdict of a "happy" School will be carried without dissent.

The Summer School is undoubtedly a highlight of the year for all who go. It is good to be with people like oneself, committed Christians who come together because they see in Drama one way of spreading the Gospel of Christ. It is good for nine days to catch a vision of the ideal—even if it is unattainable and we have to return to perform the same old Nativity scenes with the Sunday School. We rejoice to see for a brief glimpse that *Waiting for Godot* is a Christian play, even if we don't understand it and know for a certainty that we could never use it.

We get the idea, and we are stimulated. Stimulated by each other's company, by conversations over the meal table, by hilarity mixed with seriousness, by long discussions with people of different ideas, and different ways of worship. This is what makes Summer School. This is what made Exeter. We went to learn and contribute, and we did learn, from the lectures,

SUMMER SCHOOL ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, YORK

AUGUST 18th-27th, 1959

See page 20 of this issue



by permission of the Old Vic Theatre)

(Angus McBean)

CATHERINE LACEY AS QUEEN ELIZABETH I AND IRENE WORTH AS MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS IN *MARY STUART* AT THE OLD VIC

Continued from opposite page).

from the Groups, from the worship and from each other, and contributed our own devotion to our Lord and Master and our eagerness to use the Drama for Him.

I'd love to go to Italy—but I've no doubt "I'll see you next year", when, you will forgive the misquote, we may say again, among all our other activities and service for Christ there is a place where "the play's the thing, herein to catch a conscience for the King".

We thank the Society for Exeter. Its influence will last through the year, until we come to be stimulated again at York, 1959.

SUMMER SCHOOL

St. John's College, York: August 18th-27th, 1959

The ancient and historic city of York and the splendour of the Yorkshire moors and dales will be the setting for our fourteenth Annual Holiday Course of Religious Drama. It will be our third visit to St. John's College, which provides excellent accommodation for a Course of this kind.

Our work will cover many aspects, and particular emphasis will be given to the presentation of religious drama to non-Christians.

Classes in speech and movement will play a prominent part, and there will be rehearsal groups, a study group, a design group, and music sessions. Design will be given special importance and we suggest that every drama group looks around NOW to choose a designer, or potential designer, to send to York next summer to take part in a carefully planned practical course.

The entire programme will be integrated by the Chaplains and centred on worship.

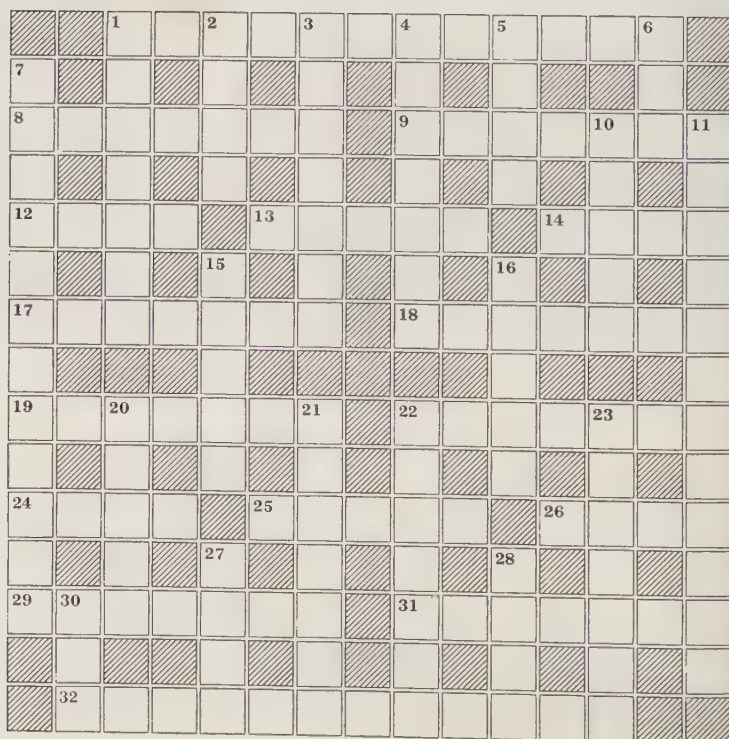
Overseas visitors will be especially welcome.

Leaflets will be available from the Society's office by December, and application forms by April.

May we ask all our readers to publicise this School far and wide.

CARINA ROBINS.

CROSSWORD



R.D.S. of G.B. LIBRARY

Change in the Library Regulations

As from August 1st, 1958, there will be NO CHARGE for the hire of single copies of plays or reference books. *Postage alone* will be charged.

MEMBERS PLEASE NOTE

ACROSS

- 1 She took the theatre by storm (5, 7).
- 8 Heavenly cast, this! (3-4).
- 9 aims high? A church's top's the answer (7).
- 12 Absalom's undoing (4).
- 13 Hunting type of country (5).
- 14 China often experiences this commotion (4).
- 17 Go to it, as Hamlet told Ophelia (7).
- 18 The Horseman's Rest (7).
- 19 Tortuous way of getting a clock to go (7).
- 22 The martyr's crown (7).
- 24 Fuel in the chartroom (4).
- 25 Scoundrel it's an honour to eat with (5).
- 26 The cold, hard sea (4).
- 29 Possible score for a tennis player swallowing his teeth (3, 4).
- 31 Sublime—and neat, in a way (7).
- 32 Describing one fierce encounter and two lesser brushes (5, 3, 4).

DOWN

- 1 Seen in a Cornish window? (7).
- 2 The wheel of duty (4).
- 3 Such a paradise was sought throughout history (7).
- 4 Slips away, and slips in (7).
- 5 Scarcely a protestant writer, one would imagine (4).
- 6 Man's extremity (3).
- 7 See where the washing should be easy (4, 3, 5).
- 10 One way or another, a maker of revolutions (5).
- 11 Capital punishment for the rush-hour shopper (12).
- 15 Spirit formerly bottled (5).
- 16 He supports seaside resorts (5).
- 20 Sort of thing astronomers look at stars through (5).
- 21 Hen in a hot spot (7).
- 22 Given, when a great conflict begins (7).
- 23 Not much of a peal at sea (3, 4).
- 27 Revolver? Show a little horse sense (4).
- 28 Initially stage people, they came back almost as new (4).
- 30 The consumer's going to do this, at last (3).

(Solution on page 25.)

ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

(Abbreviations: X—suitable for churches
H—suitable for halls)

PLAYS

The Church's Year in Music, Scripture and Verse. Arr. L. D. GIBBIN. (Oxford University Press Music Dept., 3/6.) XH.

Suitable for a patronal festival or other celebration, or for schools with a good choir.

A sequence of readings from the Bible and great English poets, interspersed with hymns and choral music, in the manner of the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. The congregation can take part.

In the Beginning, God. J. G. GRANT FLEMING. (St. Andrew's Press, 2/6.) XH.
7 scenes. Large mixed cast. (Christmas.) (No fee.)

The Mime of Bernadette. HUGH ROSS WILLIAMSON. (Burns & Oates, 2/6.) H.
Continuous action (about 45 mins.). Mimed characters: 5m., 6w., crowd.
Speakers: at least 7m., 1w.

The story of Lourdes, simply and attractively arranged for any hall. The action is mimed to lines spoken by readers at the back of the audience. (Fee: apply Margery Vosper.)

My Friend, my Brother. STUART JACKMAN. (London Missionary Society, 3/6.) H.
3 acts. 5m., 3w.

A drama about apartheid, by a Congregational minister who has worked in South Africa.

A young minister, Alec Fletcher, is in trouble with the police after a riot in an African town where he has a church. Setswana, the African minister there, is accused of instigating the disturbances, and now cannot be found. Fletcher's friendship with him, and his "liberal" views make him suspect.

Fletcher and his wife believe that Setswana has been deliberately framed. They hide him at the manse. But the telephone has been tapped, and the police arrive to make a search. Setswana incriminates himself, so as to make it seem that the Fletchers were terrorised into helping him, and he alone is arrested.

The horrifying insight Fletcher has gained into the state of mind of black and white, and his own inadequacy to deal with the situation, destroys his confidence: but his wife persuades him to go on, and meet the Africans on a new and humbler basis.

Though the play shows a tendency to oration rather than dialogue, it does tackle an important subject in no uncertain terms. (No fee.)

A New Creation. BRIAN MACDONALD-MILNE. (Typescript.) XH. Continuous action (8 episodes). 12m., 1 w.

A short dramatic sequence about the Prophets, preparing the coming of Christ. Suitable for an Advent service. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

APPEAL

The Librarian would welcome ANY VOLUNTEER who could spend some free time helping to repair books.

Any assistance will be thankfully received.

The Sinner. ELIZABETH STUCLEY. (Typescript.) XH. Continuous action (1 hr. 10 mins.) 9m., 7 w., Seven Deadly Sins.

The Rector, alone in his church after Evensong, is disturbed by a girl, Magdalen Elliott, who rushes to the chancel for sanctuary. The policeman who follows her claims that she tried to commit suicide from the bridge nearby; she insists that she was trying to kill someone else—a shadowy figure that has pursued her for days, whispering unwelcome truths—her Conscience.

The Rector investigates her past life, questioning her mother, schoolteacher, friends. . . . All make it clear that she has steadily “gone to the bad”. Magdalen herself maintains stubbornly that “none of it’s my fault”.

When finally she is driven to admit her responsibility, her situation looks hopeless. Both environment and her own choices have deformed her. She is the helpless prey of sin, unable to change her own nature, and even those who love her most cannot set her free.

It is for the Rector to bring her to Christ, the only power strong enough to conquer her weakness and restore the Magdalen that was meant to be.

This fantasy has a clear and vital message, and is also good “theatre”; it can be strongly recommended. (Fee: £1/1/-.)

Religious Drama 2: Mystery and Morality Plays. Selected by E. MARTIN BROWNE. (Meridian Books, Inc., New York, \$1.45).

Twenty-one representative extracts from the mediaeval mystery plays, with an introduction and an article on “Mediaeval Plays in Modern Production” by the editor. (Not available in Great Britain).

The Telescope. R. G. SHERRIFF. (Elek Books, 7/6.) H. 3 acts (7 scenes). 5m., 3w.

An engrossing play first heard on radio and since performed by repertory and other companies.

A clergyman takes a church in an East End district once exploited by his forebears, hoping to atone by his own service. At first he makes little headway. Then a juvenile delinquent is put into his charge, and very slowly, he wins the boy’s confidence. A happy future seems possible—the boy loves the sea, and the clergyman arranges for him to join a training ship for the Merchant Navy, and begin a new life.

Then the boy yields to sudden temptation, steals a telescope, and claims he was at the Vicarage at the time, believing that the Vicar will support his alibi. What should he do? Tell the truth, and so condemn the boy to an approved school? Or start him on his longed-for career with a known lie?

His decision should promote lively discussion. Did the Vicar do the right thing? And if not, why not? (Fee: apply Curtis Brown.)

(Continued on page 25.)

The Theatre Trap, continued from page 8.)

These then are the difficulties that we invite when we enter fully into the theatre trap. We come to see that the theatre experience is something that cannot be equated with the critical analysis and evaluation of the play; and we come also to a new appreciation for the form of dramatic material. This ancient concern for the shape of the tale, the way the play unfolds, is one that is perhaps too much neglected in the evaluation of a play’s religious implication. Our involvement in theological interpretation of drama sometimes makes us act as though form did not matter, as though the pertinent religious experience could as easily be moulded into one shape as another. The danger of ignoring content for form may lead to an abstract dead-end, but to ignore form for content leads to a denial of theatre and of art. Its shape is what makes the theatre different from a sermon or an exegesis. And variation in shape, as much as variation in subject matter, differentiates one play from another.

New York City, 1958.

EASTER PLAYS

- FINE LINEN by H. M. Richards. Reprinted. 4s. 10d.
BEHOLD YOUR KING by Thomas Doran 4s. 10d.
INNOCENT BLOOD by Thomas Doran 3s. 10d.
(limited stock)
PONTIUS PILATE by Gordon Lea 4s. 4d.
Suitable for Lent
IMMORTAL GARDEN by H. C. G. Stevens 4s. 10d.
THE SONG OF THE MORNING by T. B. Morris 4s. 10d.
YOUNGHEART by Lilian Cornelius.
A sort of "Everyman" for Juniors. 1s. 0d.

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REFERENCE LIBRARY

A Brief Historical Sketch of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain. KATHLEEN BAINBRIDGE BELL and JUNE OTTAWAY. (R.D.S., 1/6, to members 1/-.)

A pamphlet history of the development of the Society since its foundation in 1929, until 1957.

Sound and Sense. WILTON COLE. (Allen & Unwin, 6/-.)

A concise, well-written handbook on the right use of the voice, recommended to all players and producers.

Stage Noises and Effects. MICHAEL GREEN. (Herbert Jenkins, 6/-.)

How to imitate snow, trains, a man falling off a skyscraper, and other useful effects. A chapter on mikes and tape recorders is included.

Practical Stage Handbooks series.

Teaching Mime. ROSE BRUFORD. (Methuen, 15/-.)

An excellent and practical book for teachers and producers, giving plentiful suggestions for exercises in relaxation, crowd work, etc.

SPECIAL NOTES

The Firstborn. CHRISTOPHER FRY. 3rd edition. (Oxford University Press, 9/6.)

This new edition incorporates the revisions made for the New York production of April 1958.

Religious Drama for Amateur Players. By ARTHUR B. ALLEN. (Faber & Faber, 16/-.)

This volume qualifies for special review in these columns through the promise its title contains, and the high reputation of its publishers. Though having said this one must express amazement at Faber's choice, for the book can be recommended to no one who loves either the English language, amateur theatre or religious drama. Its chapter headings are all-embracing but what follows them is often trite, often misleading. An obsession with religious drama as "designed primarily to teach" postpones mention of its primary function as a form of worship till the reader has reached p. 43—if indeed he has persevered so far. Mime, perhaps the most sophisticated of media and the most difficult to do well, is put forward as "simple enough", though from a later example it would seem that the author may be confusing mime with charade. The extracts from plays, described on the dust jacket as "probably the most valuable aspect of the book", are either ludicrous or mischievous, being written partly in panto language and partly in those traditions of mediaevalism which are exactly the pitfall against which most amateur groups must constantly be on their guard.

There is a book list at the end which is most odd. It makes no mention of the York Mysteries, nor of many excellent modern commercial plays available to amateurs, though the reader is recommended to the text of the Oberammergau Passion Play for "435 men, 50 women and 200 children"! Here as elsewhere there is no mention of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain, although the dust cover claims that the author "writes with authority on religious drama, with particular reference to performances by church and parish groups". Despite an eccentric allocation of commas the book is elegantly printed throughout, giving a misleading impression of modernity to a work sadly out of touch with modern developments.

J. H.

CROSSWORD SOLUTION

CROSS: 1, Marie Tempest; 8, All-star; 9, Aspires; 12, Hair; 13, Chase; 14, Stir; 17, Nunnery; 18, Stirrup; 19, Winding; 22, Aureola; 24, Logs; 25, Heat; 26, Berg; 29, Set down; 31, Dantean; 32, Tooth and nail. DOWN: 1, Gullion; 2, Rota; 3, Warthly; 4, Elapses; 5, Pope; 6, Toe; 7, Bath and Wells; 10, Rotor; 11, Straphanging; 15, Genie; 16, Piers; 20, Night; 21, Gehenna; 22, Awarded; 23, One bell; 27, Colt; 28, Ensa; 30, Eat.

FAR AND WIDE

Blackburn, Lancs. The Young Religious Players

A producer's paradise must surely consist of a bountiful store of male characters with an equally unlimited supply of females. Here at St. Peter's Church of England Secondary Boys' School, there are five hundred boys, fifty of whom have already overcome stage fright and are steadily adapting themselves to performing on soapboxes as well as on raked stages of terrifying dimensions. For girl players, there is our sister school of St. Hilda, who have joined us to form a group now known as the Young Religious Players, under the patronage of the Bishops of Blackburn and Lancaster, and the chairmanship of the Rev. Graham Foley.

As secretary and producer, I have witnessed the rapid growth from a classroom project to a pioneering religious drama group. Since our formation in March 1957, we have made three tours in the diocese of Blackburn, performing in twenty-five different parishes some of which are over thirty miles away.

First there was *The Road to Damascus*, by Margaret Wood, later followed by Jessie Powell's plays *Led by a Star* and *Power from on High*.

And so we progress with boys and girls whose ages range between eleven and fifteen. Some act, some play musical instruments, some look after the lighting, whilst others enjoy scene-shifting and operating the sound effects.

After each tour, the producer vows that never again will he trail a coach load of thirty excited youths across Lancashire. Of course he relents. Who would not be spurred on when young folk are prepared to rehearse five evenings a week for eight weeks? There is also the firm belief that young people have so much to offer. Because of their sincerity and simplicity, they too can share and pass on the desire to worship God through their religious drama.

"And they say that young folk do nothing for the Church" is the remark of the congregation. "But God forbid that we should glory, save in the cross of Christ" must be the reply.

P. C. CHADWICK.

* * *

Furness Abbey

The first time I visited Furness Abbey was in September, 1953, and I was

amazed at its beauty. The idea of performing Mystery Plays there took root at that moment, but a few tentative enquiries seemed to show that it would not be possible. It was in July, 1955, when I began with the encouragement of the Chapter to look into the matter seriously. There followed a long and laborious correspondence with the Ministry of Works and the Religious Drama Society. At times it seemed that nothing would be done, but at last, early this year, the Ministry gave their permission for the use of the Abbey, and we could apply ourselves seriously to the many practical problems. We had terribly little time left in which to organise such a large production.

We had to select from a great range of Mystery Plays sufficient scenes to form a reasonably short but coherent cycle. We had to make our own version of the ones we wanted from the old copies. We had to find a producer, and this was far from easy.

The majority of the parts was filled after a public audition in March, but some of the remaining parts proved perversely difficult to fill. More surprisingly, it was not so easy as I had expected to find a large enough crowd.

The cost of production rapidly exceeded our estimate, and I for one was resigned to asking the parishes to make good a substantial deficit. Luckily, after a week of dreadful rain which ruined our rehearsals and made work on the site very difficult, the week of the performances dawned fine and warm. *The Evening Mail* published some fine photographs on the Monday evening, a large crowd came that night and the performance went off well. The result was capacity audiences throughout the week, and two extra performances. We have, therefore, paid our way—no mean achievement in days when so many things must be subsidised.

Everyone will have their own favourite moments to remember. My own were the Creation of Man, Mrs. Noah striding across the ramp declaring "For women are weak"; the shepherd perched on their "hill," the Procession of the Kings; the conversation of the soldiers at the Cross, and the Eruption of Hell at the Harrowing. But having made such a list, I could well begin at new one, for there were many other memorable things. Watching throughout the week one could see a nightly improvement, and I am sure we all

learned and gained a lot by our experiences. There is no doubt that the Plays made a terrific impression on the audiences, and for that we can be very happy.

W. A. BATTY.

* * *

Hornchurch, Essex

As part of the centenary celebrations of Holy Cross Church, Hornchurch, a group of parishioners staged Jessie Powell's twentieth-century version of *The Good Samaritan* on a lorry, and gave performances at five stations in different parts of the district, during the afternoon of September 13th.

The stopping points were in front of a housing estate, two pubs (one on a main road), a children's home, and the church grounds. Between them, the lorry (a big Thames-Trader) advertised its progress by a joyful noise of handbells and voices that must have been audible in Southend. At each station, a set consisting of one reversible flat, which acted both as a backcloth and a sounding board, was put up, and when these preparations had collected a crowd, the play was begun.

Though not intended as street drama, Miss Powell's script adapted very well, and if the dialogue was sometimes drowned by traffic, the key points were always sufficiently clear from the action, and there was no restiveness. It seems worth noting that some members of the audience were flatly astonished to learn that (a) the players were not children, and (b) they were not collecting for anything!

The play, which shows the Good Samaritan as a young coloured doctor in England, was even more topical during the racial disturbances in September than the players had intended when it was chosen. The African who played the part, and who works in a nearby hospital, made a deep impression with his natural dignity and sincerity, and the whole company put all they had into this telling version. Much was learned about the special problems of acting in the street, and for all concerned, this was a gruelling but very worth while experiment. It deserves every encouragement for the future.

B. J.

* * *

Huddersfield Branch

Pray for a Wind.

A biographical study of John Wesley is bound to be selective, because of the

vast range of his experience. This is particularly true of writing for the theatre, which imposes strict limitations of time, place and mood. For this reason Wesley could easily seem grotesque on the stage. According to the episodes chosen from his life, he might appear a self-obsessed fanatic, a fool in love, or merely monumental. But Morwenna Bielby's new play, *Pray for a Wind*, avoids caricature by choosing episodes with artful skill, and setting them against a pattern of movement and speech which allows much of the authentic Wesley to emerge.

The play covers the whole range of his life, and achieves considerable versatility of scene and time by the adroit use of a chorus, from which characters move from time to time to take part in the main action, rather in the manner developed by R. H. Ward in his religious plays. Not that the chorus serves merely to link the episodes; it builds up the impetus of the drama, and is often involved in a good deal of "proscenium busting", with characters appealing to the audience, and hostile crowds moving from the auditorium to the stage. Sometimes the techniques of filming are used such as an occasional use of "flash-back", but the techniques do not obtrude. They belong properly to the whole conception of the piece.

There are some disappointments. The famous experience in Aldersgate Street failed to convince in this first production, which undermined the dramatic impact of the whole. Perhaps the playing was partly to blame. But one suspects the writing is also at fault. The playwright's instinct to "play it down" is undeniably correct, for false emotion would be ruinous here, as well as offensive. But she was faced with a problem for which her method was hardly adequate: how to represent in terms of the stage-picture what was an essentially *interior* drama for the protagonist. The difficult task is managed tastefully, but the "warmed heart" of Wesley seemed hardly more than tepid.

The best writing is for the scenes between Wesley and Grace Murray, which create exactly the right atmosphere of sympathy and piety which characterised both people. The warmth of these scenes remained to the end of the play, when the Chorus, comparing our own arid generation to the smouldering ashes of the eighteenth century which were fanned to revival by the wind of the spirit, challenged the audience with the question, "Can we pray for a wind?"

This playwright leaves us in no doubt what she is about. In her hands, the vision and the challenge of Wesley's religion strike sparks from the twentieth century as they did two hundred years ago.

IVOR M. HANCOCK.

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Jersey Branch

The Jersey Branch came into being after a visit to the Island by Miss Carina Robins, early in 1956. Individual Groups have been busy since then with various productions, including *A Man's House* by John Drinkwater and *The Way of The Cross*.

In the spring of this year the Committee decided to plan a weekend Course as a prelude to the winter's work. Miss Robins was again invited to come to Jersey and conduct this and the date was fixed for October 3rd-5th. The Course was designed to interest new members so it included a session on the history of R.D.S. and its work to-day. There was also a special session for teachers and a final session on Drama and Worship, concluding with an Epilogue, on the Sunday afternoon. Excerpts were used from *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Christ in the Concrete City* for the practical demonstrations. All who attended were much helped and inspired by Miss Robins and it was felt that the whole Course had been well worthwhile.

The members of the Branch are now planning their first big effort. In February it is hoped to produce *Murder in the Cathedral*; it will be the first time that this play has been seen in Jersey.

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Madison, Wisconsin, U.S.A.

The Pool, by Kenneth Janes, presented by the Christian Arts Committee of Grace Church Centennial, at Grace Church, Madison, on May 1st and 2nd, 1958.

This is the first time that Madison has attempted a religious play out of the traditional Nativity type, and all credit should go to the courage behind the venture, whether that of the director author, the sponsor who brought him to Madison, - the actors (of many denominations) who took part, and not least to the Vicar of the Church who dared a production so far out of the ordinary.

The play tells the story of a pool, which at certain seasons runs crimson.

At the bottom of the pool the eye of faith can discern the Cross of Christ.

A programme note tells you that the play is set in and around your own church, and the time is now.

Around this Pool (whose legend comes, I think, from Mr. Janes' native Glastonbury) centres the action of the play.

The pool is indicated in the middle of the chancel. The altar is screened by a built-up screening, which to my mind was a pity though it had advantages from the acoustical angle. There were some objections it seems to playing certain of the noisier sections of the play before an open altar, but this it should have been possible to soften or render inoffensive, whereas this screening inevitably led one to feel that the church was being used as a theatre. Moreover the moving moment at the end of the play where one of the characters makes a prayer for (in brief) Grace, would have had immeasurably more impact if the altar had been visible and the whole congregation had been invited to join in.

One other critical observation is that of the purely technical problem the author set himself as director. The principal interest of the play, plotwise, lay in what was going on at the bottom of a pool deep enough to drown in. Truth may lie at the bottom of a well, but to present it there sets problems of staging which a playwright whose stage is a narrow chancel in a long-naved church would be wise to avoid if he could. Given this initial handicap, the direction got round it as well as could be expected.

The play had a good deal of interest, apart from its merit as a pioneer effort. Fundamentally the questions asked were "Has everyone the right to understand the supernatural or is understanding something to be worked for and sacrificed for?" "Is it likely that a church group (of surely unusual unpleasantness and cattiness) would see a miracle and know it for the hand of God, even if it really was there to be seen?" "What is corporate responsibility, and how do you start to grow it in a community?" "What does it mean to lay down your life for your flock?"

That these questions were posed more forcibly than they were answered is only a sign that Mr. Janes has yet to write his mature play. What is important is that the Christian group involved were willing to devote time and money in trying to body forth questions of such importance to the Christian life as these

questions are, and did not boggle either at an unfamiliar mode of expression or at the very real risks run by any church group that boldly criticises itself, and by implication, its neighbour.

K. M. BAXTER.

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Malvern, Worcs.

In June a United Anglican Missionary Exhibition was held in the Winter Gardens, Malvern. In addition to the usual activities, films were shown each evening and the New World Players were invited to produce a play. *Flame in the Forest* by Cyril J. Davey was chosen, and three performances were given to audiences drawn from all parts of the diocese.

The play, which was originally produced for B.B.C. Television, is a powerful drama set in one of the troubled parts of Africa, and deals with the difficulties of trying to convert Africans to Christianity in the face of the un-Christian example set by some of the white people both there and in England, and the personal act of faith required when the Missionary's wife is called upon to help the dying African who had killed her husband.

We have good reason to believe that those who saw the play were deeply impressed by its message; those of us concerned with its production found it most gripping, and rehearsals often ended with discussions of the problems set out within the framework of the action. Such a stimulating play was a great challenge to the Players, but the result of the performances made everyone feel that all the hard work had been very worthwhile.

"BACKSTAGER."

* * *

Mirfield, Yorks.

St. Anne and the Gouty Rector, by Henri Ghéon. Performed by students of the *Hostel of the Resurrection*, Leeds in the Quarry Theatre at Mirfield, Commemoration Day, July 12th, 1958. Producer: Miss Pamela Kelly.

This play proved a happy choice for this rather specialised occasion. It was, we believe, its first performance in this country. Like all Ghéon's work, it has a strongly French flavour and the American translation reads rather like a 'fourth form' "unseen" at times. The language need not have been as un-English as it is.

Apart from this defect, the play tells its simple Breton tale of local miracle with charm, humour and just enough conviction. It belongs essentially to "Miracle" and not at all to "Mystery".

The pious bumpkin Nicolas and the irate worldly rector are the protagonists of the play. Nicolas, with his simple peasant faith and vision is duly persecuted by the Rector and his shrewish housekeeper and the Rector is, in turn, duly attacked by a supernatural gout. In answer to the prayers of Nicolas, the Rector repents and is healed at the miraculous spring which has sprung up on the site of St. Anne's chapel in one of Nicolas's fields. So all ends in charity, mutual forgiveness and merrymaking.

It is, then, a slight piece—but for all that, it proclaims, in its genuinely unsophisticated terms, the gospel-message "Except ye become as little children..." and it carries lightly, but surely, a real sense of the supernatural.

Such a play, especially when the cast is by necessity all male (including St. Anne herself) needs a very sure and sensitive touch in production and a glance at the producer's name will be enough to tell that it had all that. The Quarry setting was most ingeniously used and the warm-coloured stone, especially on the rare occasions when the sun was pleased to visit it, enriched a warm-hearted play and at the same time suggested the austerity of Catholic peasant life.

NICOLAS GRAHAM, C.R.

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Southgate

The Comedian, by Henri Ghéon, given by the Southgate Council of Christian Churches, at Church House, May 20th-24th, 1958.

For their fourth united production, the Council chose a play of great interest, but also of great difficulty for amateur actors. The first Act and much of the second cannot ring true without knowledge of, or at any rate insight into, the mind of the professional actor, and it was not to be wondered at that this true note was often lacking, with a resultant lack of colour and suppleness which this part of the play cannot spare. But as the play went on, the producer, Ursula Nicholl, never less than efficient, drew out increasing life and force, and the last act, with its graphic choral dance and strong action, was very effective.

Norah Lambourne had ingeniously and effectively dressed the play, and her solution of the setting problem was brilliant. Given a small, wingless stage that the Irish would call "desperate", she triumphantly produced the contrasted settings of the rehearsal room, and the Theatre with its exemplary layout and amazing air of space and grandeur.

Writing in August, I still recall with pleasure the evident enthusiasm and devotion of the cast, as a team, and certain performances in particular. For example, the dignity and drily witty humanity of Diocletian; the slyly satirical portrait of the temperamental, precious, time-serving Polydorus; a well-voiced Felix; the fresh sincerity of Albina; Poppaea, particularly good in nastier moments; and the vital performance of the central character, Genesisus: his passionate sincerity made him too tense in early scenes, but carried him to considerable heights in his later ones.

It is not easy to do good work on a cramped stage, and with a "temporary" company. Miss Nicholl and her cast, therefore, deserve congratulation on their solid achievement, which augurs well for the future. But whilst we look ahead, may I put in one very strong plea?

For the first fifteen minutes of the play, perhaps owing to the bus strike, the actors fought an almost hopeless battle to be heard and to create atmosphere, against the creaks and bangs of dozens of late arrivals. Could not future latecomers be persuaded to bear their misfortune in the foyer (until a suitable break) and not inflict it upon those who have managed to come in time?

GRAHAM SUTER.

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Southwark

During Passion Week, the Southwark Cathedral Religious Drama Group produced *The Sinner*, by Elizabeth Stuckey, in the Cathedral Chapter House. This is an exciting play written in the modern idiom, the action taking place in a Church, after Evensong. As the Vicar is preparing to leave the empty Church a girl rushes up the aisle in a state of great distress. The Vicar tries to calm her and the story of her life unfolds, the scene acquiring the semblance of a Court-room with witnesses who include her Mother, husband, friends, psychologist, and even her Conscience. In a burst of noise and

movement, the girl is surrounded by the Seven Deadly Sins, who proclaim themselves her true and only friends. They try to make her succumb and go away with them, but in the end they are defeated and the girl, through contrition, is resolved to return home and start her life anew.

The Chapter House was effectively transformed into the semblance of a Church by the suggestion of an Altar beneath an East window. The Production by Miss Ursula Nicholl was unfussy and direct, and deserves special congratulation on her choreography of the Sins, who were very good both in movement and characterisation. The whole Company played with great sincerity, making the characters real and plausible, and it was refreshing to see a group tackle such an enterprising play, moving away from the traditional Biblical and often rather sentimental plays which are sometimes associated with "Religious" drama.

R. K.

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Stroud, Glos.

The offering at this year's Stroud Religious Drama Festival in October was Ladislav Fodor's *The Vigil*. This piece was played for two hours without a break on a platform erected before the chancel screen. The opening moments of locking the court room and leaving it deserted ready to be peopled by the characters of the drama were omitted, a concession presumably to the necessity of acting the play in church. This last defect was turned to positive advantage as the play was actually presented, for the production had the atmosphere of a mediaeval ecclesiastical trial though the costumes and technique are modern. At the end the continuation of the Risen Body of the Saviour in the living Church was demonstrated by the robed parish clergy with servers and choir joining the congregation in the singing of "Jesus Christ is risen to-day".

The acting was of a high quality and included two performances of great power by the Magdalene and the prosecuting Counsel, and one of unusual interest by the Pilate, shown as a type of all dissatisfied, self-corroded provincial conquerors. The presence in the audience of the Bishops of Gloucester and Tewkesbury was a stimulus to all who took part and a deserved tribute to the growing reputation of the Stroud Festival.

J. H.

Sweden

Olov Hartman's new play, *The Fiery Furnace*, attracted quite considerable attention at its premiere, as religious plays are not very frequently performed in Sweden except at the great festivals of Christmas and Easter.

It was performed in the best possible of settings, in the open-air church of the Sigtuna Foundation. The actors, some professionals but mostly amateurs and students at Uppsala University, were dressed in black, white and red costumes. They were placed in careful relation to the cross and altar, and as twilight fell around the church situated far above Lake Mälär the actors emerged ever more clearly in the spotlights. It was very beautiful.

Hartman has taken his material from the Book of Daniel and the Apocalypse. Yet he is not concerned merely with the reproduction of two biblical tales. *The Fiery Furnace* treats of questions crucial to the Swedish Church of to-day; the division of parties, and the relation of church to state. Towards the end the action is brought onto a broadly humane level as the author includes the experiments with nuclear weapons. It is a remarkably bold play which goes straight to the point. It is very well produced by Nyström, our expert on religious drama.

... I think the students must have had a pleasant time in Sigtuna. They formed a collective household at the producer's house, although rehearsing time was probably rather pressed with fifteen people queuing up for the potato pan. ...

INGEGERD DU RIETZ.

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Thetford, Norfolk

Despite a great deal of criticism and disinterest, the town of Thetford boldly staged a production of the modern adaptation by Maurice Hussey of the *Chester Mystery Plays* during the first week of June, around the Festival of Corpus Christi.

About a hundred players and almost as many backstage hands, drawn from a population of 4,000, were involved, most of whom had never set foot on a stage before. Indeed the presentation of mystery plays was the nearest approach in modern times to the mediaeval guild system.

The skilful direction of Donald Pye from Norwich which also disguised the players' lack of experience, the excellent

performances as God the Father and Jesus of two leading amateur actors from Kings Lynn and Norwich, the well handled sound amplification, and handsome locally made costumes, combined with the beautiful natural mediaeval setting of a wooded rampart in Castle Park gave a moving three-and-a-quarter hours experience to 1,500 people.

The company also accepted an invitation to take the plays to the Nottingham University Festival of Arts at the end of June.

V. M.

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Correction

It was stated in "Far and Wide", Summer 1958, that *La Chapelle Ardente* by Gabriel Marcel, as produced at Hull by the Company of the Way, was receiving its first amateur performance in this country. This was incorrect. It was in fact produced at the Plymouth Arts Centre in November 1955.

West Riding County Council

BRETTON HALL

TRAINING COLLEGE FOR TEACHERS OF MUSIC, ART AND DRAMA

A two-year course of initial training for men and women wishing to make their particular contribution to a school through the teaching of drama will be held at Bretton Hall commencing in September, 1959. Students will be prepared for work in secondary schools and will include in the course as principal studies, English, Drama and Movement Education. They will also be expected to take part in the general training in the Arts provided by the College.

Enquiries should be sent to the Principal, Bretton Hall, West Bretton, Wakefield.

NOTES FROM THE BACK PEW

A Saying of Epictetus

Remember that you are an actor in a drama, of such a kind as the author pleases to make of it. If short, of a short one: if long, of a long one.

If it be his pleasure you should act a poor man, a cripple, a governor, or a private person, see that you act it naturally. For this is your business, to act well the character assigned to you; to choose it is another's business.

Beginnings

"Drama is the most vivid possible way of telling a story"

—TYRONE GUTHRIE in a recent lecture.

"When in great joy a man pronounces words,
His words not sufficing, he prolongs them;
The prolonged words not sufficing, he modulates them;
The modulated words not sufficing,
Without even being conscious of it . . .
He finds his hands gesticulating and his feet bouncing . . ."

—Ancient Chinese Proverb.

A Suggestion . . .

King René of Jerusalem and Anjou was exceptionally fond of Mystery Plays. He is said to have been so moved by a performance of a Passion Play at Arles that he remitted all taxes on the city for two years.

Would Mr. Martin Browne consider inviting the Chancellor of the Exchequer to York next time?

Invitation to the Play

(Overheard): "Well, no, it isn't a religious play *exactly* . . . but there's a Vicar in it, and it's awfully sad in parts. . . ."

Many Happy Returns

Miss Athene Seyler, a former Chairman of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain, this year completes fifty years of brilliant success in the theatre since winning the Gold Medal of the Academy of Dramatic Art. We offer her sincere gratitude and congratulations, and assurances of our excited anticipation for the future.

CAPELLA.